

VZCZCXRO9394  
OO RUEHFL RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHROV RUEHSR  
DE RUEHSI #0262/01 0461203  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
O 151203Z FEB 08  
FM AMEMBASSY TBILISI  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8890  
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TBILISI 000262

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR DAS BRYZA & EUR/CARC

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/14/2018

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [UN](#) [GG](#)

SUBJECT: HOW MUCH DISTANCE BETWEEN GEORGIANS AND ABKHAZ IN  
GENEVA MEETING?

REF: A. TBILISI 252

[1](#)B. TBILISI 246

Classified By: Ambassador John F. Tefft for reasons 1.4(B&D).

#### Summary

-----  
[1](#)1. (C) The convergence of several developments -- the apparently increasing anger of the Abkhaz de facto leadership, the strong focus on engagement by new Georgian State Minister for Reintegration Yakobashvili, and most of all the coincidence of timing with the Kosovo decision -- makes for a decidedly unpredictable mixture in the February 18-19 meeting of the sides and the Group of Friends in Geneva. While this combination of factors may make it difficult to reach many significant agreements, the meeting is a timely opportunity for the Friends, or at least the Western Friends, to underscore that Kosovo has in no way changed their approach to the Abkhazia conflict. The UN hopes to use the meeting to make progress on a range of issues, including resumption of the security dialogue and confidence-building measures. End Summary.

#### Two Sides, Two Different Messages

-----  
[1](#)2. (C) During a recent visit to Sukhumi, the German and British Ambassadors found de facto president Bagapsh and de facto foreign minister Shamba in a more angry mood than they ever remembered (ref A). Shamba lashed out at the UN, the Friends, and the international community, leading the British Ambassador to suspect that the Abkhaz may have received an unwelcome message from Moscow that no recognition would be forthcoming following Kosovo. While the Abkhaz appear to be more unyielding than usual, new Georgian State Minister for Reintegration Yakobashvili is talking in both public and private about new initiatives to end Abkhaz isolation, including reduction of economic sanctions (ref B). Some of Yakobashvili's statements and actions -- especially the renaming of his ministry to highlight reintegration -- have offended Abkhaz sensitivities, but the Abkhaz could not have missed the change in rhetoric he has brought to the job. Shamba was quoted February 13 calling for the re-opening of the railroad through Abkhazia, something Yakobashvili has also endorsed and which is somewhat controversial inside Abkhazia. Despite such potential areas of agreement, the Abkhaz decision whether to take a constructive approach in this meeting will likely depend on their perception of the politics of Kosovo -- i.e., on what messages they want to send to the Western Friends, the Russians, and the Georgians.

#### All Quiet on the Cease-Fire Line?

-----  
[1](#)3. (C) There have been several alarming press reports recently of tension in the Gali region, including interviews with de facto presidential representative Ruslan Kishmaria suggesting that Abkhaz forces could occupy currently

Georgian-controlled territory in military operations. UN Senior Political Advisor Atanas Baltov told us February 13 that while Kosovo was contributing to a sense of uncertainty in Gali, the situation did not seem greatly different from usual. He said Kishmaria was repeating comments he had made many times before -- that if Georgia attacks Abkhazia, the Abkhaz would not limit themselves to their own territory in response -- and Baltov did not think the timing of these interviews was related to Kosovo. Baltov indicated that UN had not seen an unusual increase in security incidents. Turning to internal politics in Sukhumi, Baltov noted that there appeared to be a difference in the language used by Shamba and Bagapsh on Kosovo, with Shamba explicitly saying a Russian failure to recognize Abkhazia would hurt Moscow's standing throughout the Caucasus, while Bagapsh has stressed that Russia is a great power with many interests to take into account.

#### A Sizable Agenda

14. (C) Baltov explained that the UN hopes to use the meeting to move forward on a number of agenda items still outstanding from the Bonn meeting in June 2007, including the unfulfilled confidence-building measures (CBMs) originally agreed in Geneva in February 2007. One of the most important items is resumption of the security dialogue in a format that would replace the stalled Quadripartite Meetings. Baltov noted that then-State Minister Bakradze had reached an agreement in principle with Shamba in October to re-start security meetings. Only minor differences still remain on the details, including the frequency of meetings (the Georgians favor every three weeks while the Abkhaz have agreed to the UN proposal of every two weeks) and the level of the head of the Georgian delegation (the Abkhaz side would be represented

TBILISI 00000262 002 OF 002

by Kishmaria).

15. (C) The UN also intends to use the Geneva meeting to follow up on implementation of other previously agreed measures, including the Joint Fact-Finding Group (JFFG) investigation of the February 2007 disappearance of Gali election official David Sigua. Baltov said seven JFFG meetings had been held on this case, but the investigation has not yet closed. Baltov said the UN saw signs of "increased self-censorship" on the part of Georgian witnesses. Another measure is identification of missing persons from the war, and Baltov noted to us that there had been a joint technical visit in September 2007 to Cyprus to study the experience there. There will also be discussion on the European Commission-funded rehabilitation program, which is being carried out in three overlapping "phases" of just under 2 million euros each, with the third falling under the European Neighborhood initiative. In the past the Georgians have expressed great frustration to us that they have little say or information about the program, and after considerable Georgian pressing the first two meetings of the program's Steering Committee took place in 2007. While this was a step forward, the Georgians have continued to have concerns about the non-transparent implementation of the program, and they claim that the Abkhaz share these concerns. The UN hopes to be able to break an impasse about one Gali project proposed by the Georgians; the Abkhaz have rejected it, insisting that each side undertake projects only in territory it controls.

16. (C) Another major chunk of the discussion will center on outstanding CBMs. The sides have thus far been unable to reach agreement on how to implement increased diaspora contacts and maritime communication between Sukhumi and Trabzon, Turkey. Regarding the CBM of greater civil society contacts between the sides, there were some meetings in the first half of 2007 but Baltov said that the Georgians backed away from this as the year went on, arguing instead for meetings of professional organizations and groups. Baltov saw potential for confidence-building in combating the common threats of African Swine Fever and Avian Influenza.

¶7. (C) Finally, the UN continues to be interested in a meeting at the leadership level between the sides. The Abkhaz have set Georgian withdrawal from the Upper Kodori -- a non-starter with Tbilisi -- as a pre-condition for the meeting, and have also pushed for a non-use of force agreement to be signed at such a meeting.

Comment

-----

¶8. (C) This meeting will take place while all eyes are on Kosovo, and it is a timely opportunity for the Western Friends to underscore that Kosovo has in no way changed their approach to the Abkhazia conflict.

TEFFT